657

# A SERMON

ON OCCASION OF

THE SETTLEMENT OF A PEOPLE,

LATELY UNITED IN

THE ORDER OF THE GOSPEL.

PRICE SIXPENCE.

2612

A

# SERMON

ON OCCASION OF

THE SETTLEMENT OF A PROPER

LATELY UNITED IN

THE ORDER OF THE GOSPEL.

PRICE SIXPENCE.

*The Church an Habitation of God, through the Spirit.*

---

A

# SERMON

ON OCCASION OF

## THE SETTLEMENT OF A PEOPLE,

LATELY UNITED IN

## THE ORDER OF THE GOSPEL:

Preached at Mr. WALLIN's Meeting-Houſe, near the Maze-Pond, Southwark, Jan. 13, 1774.

WITH

## THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS.

---

BY BENJAMIN WALLIN, A.M.

---

The LORD is in his holy Temple. PSALM xi. 4.

---

LONDON:

Printed for G. KEITH;

And ſold by Meſſ. BUCKLAND, GARDINER, and TOMKINS; and alſo by R. BISHOP, in Newport-Street, Leiceſter-Fields.

MDCCLXXIV.

BRITISH
MUSEUM

# INTRODUCTION.

*Some time having been ſpent in prayer,* Dr. Stennett *addreſſed the Church to this effect*—

AS a ſeparation has not long ſince taken place in the Church lately under the paſtoral care of the Rev. Dr. Gill, occaſioned by a difference of opinion reſpecting the choice of the Rev. Mr. Rippon their preſent Paſtor; and as, with their cordial approbation and conſent, the perſons ſo ſeparating have agreed to form themſelves into a diſtinct Chriſtian Church; and as you, my Friends, thus formed by mutual conſent, have invited us to be witneſſes of your incorporation:—it is our deſire that one of you will be pleaſed to inform this Audience of the particulars of that ſolemn tranſaction.

*This was accordingly done, and the Members of the Church ſignified their concurrence by lifting up their hands.*

PERMIT me now, my Friends, *it was added*, to congratulate you upon this publick recognition of that ſolemn tranſaction among yourſelves, by which you have been formed into a diſtinct Chriſtian Community. I ſay CONGRATULATE, becauſe however the occaſion of it is, in one view, unpleaſing; yet, in another, it is happy. A SCHISM, and a SEPARATION are two very diſtinct things: the former is diſhonourable, ſinful, and pernicious; the latter lawful, and in ſome caſes neceſſary. In this ſituation, not as angrily rending yourſelves from the Church to which you belonged, but peaceably and with their conſent ſeparating; in this ſituation, I ſay, we conſider you. Indeed it were to be wiſhed, that there were no ſeparations in any Churches, but ſuch as are occaſioned by their members becoming ſo numerous as to render it inconvenient, if not impoſſible, for them all to meet under one roof. But there are other occaſions equally lawful, and which may be

over

over ruled by Providence to ends the moſt deſirable and important.

The rights of private judgment, and of every individual to chuſe for himſelf who ſhall be his inſtructor in the great concerns of religion, are very important rights. They are rights for which our pious Anceſtors contended at the hazard of their lives: and it were well if we, as Diſſenters from the eſtabliſhed Church, were duly ſenſible of the privilege we in theſe reſpects enjoy. Now, occaſions of that kind upon which we are at preſent aſſembled, afford an opportunity of decently and properly aſſerting theſe rights to the view of the whole world. This you now do; and the doing it in this truly Chriſtian manner will, I hope, have a happy effect to ſerve and promote the cauſe of religious liberty. At the ſame time, give me leave to obſerve, that theſe rights, which you enjoy as men and as Chriſtians, ought not to be abuſed to the gratification of mere fancy

or imagination. For, an unhappy humour of this ſort, were it to prevail, would in a courſe of time, by dividing the intereſt of Chriſt, greatly weaken and injure it. But, as I perſuade myſelf you are not influenced by mere fancy or humour, I truſt this conſequence will not follow.

ANOTHER good purpoſe that, I flatter myſelf, will be anſwered by this ſeparation in the manner it has taken place, is the exhibiting on both ſides ſuch a mild, candid, charitable temper to the view of all around you, as will be exemplary to other Churches, and nobly ornamental to the Chriſtian Profeſſion. It is a great and ſingular happineſs that, however you and our other worthy Friends havediffered in opinion reſpecting the choice of a Paſtor, yet you can cordially agree to acknowledge one another as Chriſtian Churches, and to wiſh and pray for each others welfare and proſperity. We feel real pleaſure on the occaſion: I ſpeak not only my own ſenſe,

but

but that of my Brethren in the miniſtry, and of every truly pious perſon in this aſſembly.

And then another and main advantage which will, I hope, accrue from this event, is the enlargement of the Redeemer's kingdom and intereſt among us. I am very ſenſible that this diviſion, though not like that of Reuben, muſt have occaſioned many ſearchings of heart. And it is fit that ſerious enquiry ſhould be made by all concerned into the motives that have urged them to it, and the temper they have diſcovered in all the tranſactions leading to it. But, whatever pain the recollection of ſome unavoidable imperfections attending the management of this buſineſs, may have occaſioned; that pain will, it is hoped, be balanced by the pleaſure ariſing from the deſirable proſpect before you all of the ſpread of real religion, and an addition to the number of the faithful diſciples of Chriſt. If your prayers, my Friends, for the people from you whom are ſeparated, theirs for you, and

ours

ours for you both, are graciouſly heard; there will be happy cauſe, in time to come, to look back with joy and thankfulneſs on this providence.

I HAVE now only to add, that we cordially accept your invitation to offer our prayers to God this day on your behalf; that you may walk in the fear of the Lord and the comforts of the Spirit; that your hearts may be knit together in love; that you may abound in every good word and work; that you may in due time be directed to a Paſtor after God's own heart, who ſhall feed you with knowledge and underſtanding; that you may increaſe in numbers, gifts, and graces; and that, at length, you and all other Chriſtian Societies of every denomination, which compoſe the one univerſal Church, may be made perfect with Jeſus Chriſt our great Head in the realms of light and glory above.

*Several Miniſters prayed, the Reverend Mr. Wallin delivered the following diſcourſe, and the Rev. Mr. Rippon cloſed the ſervice with prayer.*

# SERMON.

EPHESIANS II. 22.

———*For an Habitation of God through the Spirit.*

IN addreſſing you, my Friends, on this ſingular and important occaſion, nothing ſeemed more pertinent or needful than to fix your thoughts on the deſign of that conſtitution in which you are joined: A due ſenſe of this will conduce to a ſpirit and conduct becoming the ſacred character you bear, for want of which ſome communities have degenerated into a wilderneſs of confuſion and diſcord, and at length have moſt ſhamefully diſſolved.

MOST of you have many years enjoyed the like chriſtian fellowſhip with others, under the direction of a Paſtor, whoſe ſuperior abi-

lities are manifeſt in his many judicious publications, which will perpetuate his name to poſterity: I therefore do not conſider you as ſtrangers to that criterion of a goſpel church preſented in the text; but, ſeeing you this day offer yourſelves before God, angels and men, as newly incorporated in the name of Jeſus, I hope it will not be unſeaſonable to remind you of a point in which your dignity and happineſs as a people are ſo nearly concerned. And this I the rather do, as but too many, now, by their behaviour ſeem to have loſt ſight of this glory of the Lord in his ſanctuary.

THESE diſciples at Epheſus are evidently conſidered in a ſocial capacity: Thus runs the context; "And are built upon the foundation of the apoſtles and prophets, Jeſus Chriſt himſelf being the chief corner ſtone, in whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye alſo are builded together;" i. e. ſay ſome in the church univerſal; q. d. "Ye a particular body, in like manner as the catholic church, are co-edified, or built together, a conſtituent part of the ſame divine building." Thus they would make each goſpel church an

image

image and member of that which is univerſal: but this forced conſtruction of the paſſage ſeems adapted to favor an eccleſiaſtical ſyſtem of police, for which there appears no foundation in the oracles of God. Indeed the church, myſtically taken, is univerſal or catholic; it comprehends all the choſen and redeemed, out of every nation, who have, are, or ſhall be gathered to Jeſus, who is the head of the body the church, Coloſ. i. 18. Alſo in this epiſtle, chap. i. 23. the church is ſaid to be "his body:" and in the ſame ſenſe we underſtand the word in chap. v. 25. "Chriſt loved the church, and gave himſelf for it." The church, likewiſe, whom Saul and other blind zealots moſt cruelly perſecuted, may be ſtyled univerſal, ſince all who called on the name of Chriſt, in every place, were expoſed to their rage. [Gal. i. 23. compared with Acts ix. 2.] But theſe chriſtians, as already obſerved, are addreſſed as a particular body in Chriſt, united in the order of the goſpel. Nor have we any idea of a viſible catholic church, poſſeſſed of governing authority, in all the New Teſtament. If ſuch a community exiſted, a viſible catholic biſhop would be needful: and on this arrogant, but

groundleſs pretence of the Romiſh church, it is notorious, her biſhop, the Pope, has proudly aſſumed a ſupreme juriſdiction over all Chriſtendom. But the building deſcribed in the context, is no other than anſwers to every ſociety of the faithful, who, united by a ſolemn covenant in the Lord, meet in one place under their proper officers, as appointed by him, who now, as a Son, ſuperintends his own houſe. At Epheſus, as in all other places, in the primitive times, the diſciples being thus joined together, are ſaid to be built upon the foundation of the apoſtles and prophets, Jeſus Chriſt himſelf the chief corner ſtone, in whom, i. e. in Chriſt Jeſus, the whole building fitly framed and diſpoſed, as directed in the word, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; the ſame idea is conveyed in the clauſe immediately preceding the text, "in whom, i. e. in Chriſt Jeſus, ye alſo are builded together;" which agrees with Col. ii. 7. "Rooted and built up in him;" a parallel paſſage with 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5. where this ſpiritual houſe is repreſented, as reſting on the authority and power of Jeſus, whom the Father hath choſen, and laid a foundation in Zion.

Now

Now this view of the faithful in a goſpel church ſtate firſt implies UNION. It is eſſential to a building that the parts are united; and, accordingly, the ſaints in this fellowſhip are externally joined to one another, by mutual conſent, and they are or ought to be, cordially united in judgment and love, having one Lord, one faith, one baptiſm, it becomes them, as thoſe at Jeruſalem, to be of one heart, and of one ſoul. A mere external union is a deception which muſt be unpleaſing to the omniſcient and holy Redeemer, and cannot anſwer the end of chriſtian communion. This metaphor alſo carries in it the idea of ORDER. Every houſe has its form, and is raiſed on ſome plan drawn or choſen by the maſter builder; in like manner a church is not a caſual irregular aſſembly, but a ſociety of believers fitly framed together, according to the wiſdom and will of the divine Jeſus, the great architect and proprietor of this ſpiritual houſe. It was this order among the diſciples at Coloſſe that afforded the apoſtle ſuch unſpeakable pleaſure, Col. ii. 5. a joy highly rational in thoſe who love Zion, for hence reſults BEAUTY, which is another thing imported by this view of the ſaints; thus harmoniouſly

cemented,

cemented, they are comely as Jeruſalem, like a company of horſes in Pharoah's chariots, Cant. i. 9. not only ſtrong and bold, as becomes the warfare of faith, being ſtrong in the grace which is in Chriſt Jeſus, but exceeding beautiful, well matched, drawing together in their traces, as it were ſtep by ſtep, in the chariot of a goſpel profeſſion; theſe are the footſteps of the flock, unto which enquiring ſouls are directed, ver. 8. which are amiable in themſelves, and precious in the ſight of the Lord. Some may ignorantly boaſt in an irrregular and confuſed manner of ſocial religion; they may deſpiſe order, and cenſure their brethren, who conſcientiouſly keep the ordinances as they were delivered from the beginning, but every deviation from the pattern is a deformity in the building: order is the ſource of beauty in the natural and in the moral world, and the beauty of the ſaints is in proportion to their order in Chriſt; and further, we have conveyed by this draught an idea of CAPACITY FOR USEFULNESS. A well contrived houſe is adapted to the convenience and comfort of its inhabitants; and glorious are the accomodations for a humble and gracious ſoul among the ſaints in communion, who walk

walk together uprightly in all the commandments of the Lord.

But the ſubject before us is the *principal end* of this divine houſe: a practical ſenſe of this will have an important influence on all who compoſe it, for the want of which ſome preſume in a looſe careleſs manner, under this ſacred profeſſion to their own great diſadvantage and the grief of their brethren, by which alſo the Holy Ghoſt is offended, whoſe operations and gifts are needful to the growth or exiſtence of a church. Our attention is required to the *deſign* of this incorporation of the faithful in goſpel order, or, in other words, for what *end* theſe Epheſians, and all ſaints in the like fellowſhip, are united? And, behold the noble deſign of this divine inſtitution! "In whom, ſays the apoſtle, ye are builded together, FOR AN HABITATION OF GOD THROUGH THE SPIRIT." Be aſtoniſhed at the grace! The end of this building is nothing ſhort of a dwelling for the Moſt High!

In handling this wonderful ſentence I ſhall humbly attempt to explain it, aſcertain the reſidence of God in his church, and then, to our further improvement, point to ſome things ſuggeſted by the declaration that merit our notice;

tice; and, may the Lord incline us, to embrace and apply what may be exhibited from the ſcripture, on a ſubject ſo ſublime and myſterious, and render it ſubſervient to our more perfect knowledge of Chriſt!

THREE things are preſented in the paſſage; namely, the general uſe of this ſpiritual houſe, "*for an habitation*;" its glorious inhabitant, which is *God*; and the *medium* or *mode* by which Jehovah is graciouſly pleaſed to take up, and continue his abode with his people.

I. A GOSPEL church is for an *habitation* or *dwelling*. An idea eſſential to the metaphor. Saints united in this order are a ſpiritual houſe, which ſuppoſes inhabitants: This divine conſtitution or building, however beautiful and grand, when viewed in a juſt point of light, is not erected for a mere ſhew, much leſs intended to be ſolitary; nor is it poſſible that it ſhould ſtand alone. Earthly fabricks are often forſaken. Men build large and fair houſes, but after all their trouble and expence, through ſome occaſion, either cannot, or will not dwell in them; hence we ſometimes ſee the ſeats of the great, yea and the palaces of princes, falling to decay, and in a manner

manner entirely demoliſhed; but the houſe of God cannot exiſt in a ſtate of total deſolation; its materials are its inhabitants, for every one who belongs to a church of Chriſt has a manſion therein. The faithful may be diſtinguiſhed in theſe different capacities and relations, but there is no ſeparating this building from the ſaints who dwell in it, they are one and the ſame; not only builded together for an habitation, but, if I may ſo expreſs it, they are inhabited by themſelves, each one dwelling in that houſe, whereof he is a member; a myſtery this, in no degree abſurd, but perfectly rational, yea, eſſential to a body framed of intelligent beings, as the church; in which every worſhipper claims a place where he has a name; and accordingly to dwell in the houſe of the Lord for ever, was the ardent deſire and joyful hope of Old-Teſtament-ſaints, Pſalm xxiii. 6. and xxvii. 4. which cannot be decently confined to the material building of Solomon's temple, though that was ceremonially ſacred, for literally ſpeaking, no one could deſire to dwell in that houſe for ever; but his place in the aſſemblies of Zion, where the Lord put his name, and communed with his people, is

what the pious Iſraelite preferred to any enjoyment in life.

But the ſubject before us is not the inhabitation of the faithful in the church they compoſe; much leſs is it that of an angel: Holy angels, it ſhould ſeem, are round about Zion, and many of them, though inviſible, preſent in her aſſemblies, which ſome have thought evident from 1 Cor. xi. 10. but Paul's charge to Timothy before the Lord Jeſus Chriſt and the elect angels, to obſerve the inſtructions he had given him, ſeems a ſtrong intimation that they are to be conſidered as attending the church on earth; which is the more credible from that famous appeal concerning them in Heb. i. 4. "Are they not all miniſtering ſpirirs ſent forth to miniſter for them who ſhall be heirs of ſalvation?" Some have thought that the paintings and carvings of cherubs in the tabernacle and temple, and more eſpecially thoſe prying over the mercy-ſeat, were typical of angels in the church; be that as it may, from the above we are led to conſider them as beholding our order in Chriſt; nevertheleſs theſe holy ſpirits are not of the redeemed unto God by the blood of his Son, nor have they, properly ſpeaking, a name

name or a place in the houſe of this building; indeed in Jeruſalem above, they join thoſe of the juſt made perfect, Heb. xii. 22, 23. and accordingly we read in Rev. v. 11. that John heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, with the beaſts and elders, giving honor to the Lamb that was ſlain; and we have reaſon from ſcripture to conclude, that they will be our everlaſting companions in glory, but the church militant is not the dwelling place of angels. But,

II. THE great ONE for whoſe reſidence this houſe is erected, is no other or leſs than *God himſelf:* "For an habitation OF GOD." This may be applied to each divine perſon. The Son no doubt has a dwelling in his houſe over which he preſides: of this we are inſured, Matt. xviii. 20. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, ſays the Lord, there am I in the midſt of them;" and again, chap. xxviii. 20. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." He is likewiſe preſented, Rev. ii. 1. walking in the midſt of the golden candleſticks. And that the Holy Ghoſt has an abode with the ſaints, is not to be queſtioned, for he dwells

in each of them, Rom. viii. 11. "By his Spirit that dwelleth in you." He it was againſt whom the church rebelled in the wilderneſs, Iſaiah lxiii. 10. And that the ſame divine perſon is with the ſaints now, is evident from Acts xiii. 2. where we find the Holy Ghoſt directing the diſciples to ſeparate Saul and Barnabas whom he had called to a particular ſervice; but, accurately ſpeaking, the Father is intended, ſeeing the perſon referred to ſtands diſtinguiſhed from Jeſus, in whom the church is built, and alſo from the Spirit, through whom this habitation of God is maintained: It is God in Chriſt, who hath reconciled us to himſelf by his Son, in whoſe face the light of his glory ſhines forth in the goſpel. Nevertheleſs in this fellowſhip we have communion with each divine perſon, no doubt with the Father and the Son. John xiv. 23. ſaith our Lord, with reſpect to the man who loves him and keepeth his words, "My Father will love him and we will come unto, and make our abode with him." And again, 1 John i. 3. "Truly our fellowſhip is with the Father, and with his Son Jeſus Chriſt." And it ſcarce will be denied that the ſaints, in this order, are given to expect communion

munion with the Holy Ghoſt. Thus the ultimate and grand deſign of this ſpiritual building is to be an habitation of the moſt High; that the Lord God might reſide in the midſt of his people: but, will God indeed dwell on the earth! how is this, or after what manner? which leads,

III. To the *medium* or *mode* of this gracious reſidence of God with his people: and the text declares it is, "through the Spirit." This may be applied to the habitation itſelf; and then it intimates the dependance of the ſaints on the Holy Ghoſt for their exiſtence, in the faith and fellowſhip of the goſpel. In this ſpiritual houſe each one is formed by the Spirit, and made a lively ſtone for the building; on the ſame divine Agent alſo, every one depends for his increaſe in grace, with which ſtands connected their proſperity and continuance in a ſocial capacity, for this houſe is ſupported by its members: and further, the church being in a mutable ſtate, requires frequent additions, otherwiſe, from mortality alone, a diſſolution would enſue: now there is not a grace exerciſed, nor a good work performed, nor a ſingle ſaint joined, or any thing

eſſential

eſſential to the being of a church, without the Holy Ghoſt; ſo then, the faithful are dependant on his operations and grace for their capacity as a ſpiritual houſe. But it is more natural and proper to apply this to the inhabitation of God, and then it either denotes, in general, that his reſidence in the church is ſpiritual and wonderful; ſo indeed is all communion of the infinitely perfect and bleſſed Jehovah with his creatures, on earth or in heaven; it is adorable condeſcenſion and aſtoniſhing grace! Or, rather, this is to be underſtood of the Lord's dwelling in Zion, in and by the Holy Ghoſt, which agrees with the ſcripture account. We have already ſeen that of old God was preſent with his people by the Spirit, againſt whom they rebelled: and in Jer. vi. 8. he ſaith, "Be inſtructed, O Jeruſalem, leſt my ſoul, or *Spirit* depart from thee." This is the œconomy of divine manifeſtation revealed in the word; the abode and communion of the Father and the Son, is by the Holy Ghoſt, even the Spirit of truth, who proceedeth from both; [compare John xiv. 16. with chap. xv. 26.] And that this is the mode of the divine preſence in the church ſeems evident from 1 Cor. iii. 16.

iii. 16. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" and again, chap. vi. 19. it is ſaid, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghoſt, which is in you?"

THIS, Beloved, is the end of your conſtitution, as a church of the living God; a character truly ſublime and ſacred: you are joined together in the Lord, "for an habitation of God through the Spirit;" the divine Father, in his own Son, through the Spirit, and conſequently each divine perſon reſides in you. How awful and glorious this place! It is none other but the houſe of God, and the gate of heaven. Who is worthy of conſtituting a part of this divine building! and what reverence and purity becomes thoſe who are admitted to dwell with the Lord in his ſanctuary! Let us now proceed,

SECONDLY, To prove the *reſidence* of Jehovah in his church. How does it appear that the ſaints in communion are indeed an habitation of God through the Spirit? I apprehend that the following things ſufficiently aſcertain this important fact.

1. THE *names* which chriſtians bear in their ſocial capacity. In this goſpel union they

are

are ſtyled the *houſe of God*, 1 Tim. iii. 15*. The eſtates of the rich may contain many houſes, but the houſe of a great man or prince, to which there is an alluſion, is not barely his property, but his manſion. We are told, 1 Kings vii. 1. that Solomon finiſhed "his houſe," that is, as appears from ver. 8. his houſe "where he dwelt." And that this idea belongs to the houſe of God is evident from 2 Sam. vii. 5. "Go, and tell my ſervant David, thus ſaith the Lord, Shalt thou build me an houſe, for me to dwell in?" As alſo from Pſalm xxvi. 8. "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy houſe, and the place where thine honor dwelleth." Now this agrees with the word *habitation*, in the text, uſed only once more in the Teſtament†, where it ſignifies a dwelling-place. This character therefore implies the inhabitation of Jehovah in

* It is remarkable that the term KIRK, which the Scots attribute to what among us is commonly called Church, is derived from two words, Κυριου οικος, which ſtrictly and properly ſignify the houſe or dwelling-place of the Lord; though the word Εκκλησια, rendered church in the New Teſtament from Εκκαλεω, to call out, ſeems more expreſſive of this ſpiritual building, which conſiſts of a people aſſembling together, as appointed, in purſuance of their heavenly calling.

† Rev. xviii. 2.

his

his church. But there is a ſtill more expreſſive character of believers in communion: they are ſtyled the TEMPLE of God, 1 Cor. iii. 16. It is the reſidence of Deity that conſtitutes a temple. And thus the Holy Ghoſt explains it, 2 Cor. vi. 16. "Ye are the temple of the living God:" How does it appear? It follows, "as God hath ſaid, I will dwell in them, and walk in them." The holy place, to which there ſeems an alluſion in the viſion of John, Rev. xv. 5. even the tabernacle of the teſtimony, is ſtyled the temple, on account of the glory of the Lord, who dwelt between the cherubims, Pſalm lxxx. 1. that is, on the covering of the ark or cheſt which contained the teſtimony of the covenant, called the mercy-ſeat, Heb. ix. 5. For the ſame reaſon, I apprehend, the body of Jeſus, who is the Son of God, is ſtyled a Temple, John ii. 19. and in Heb. ix. 11. A greater and more perfect tabernacle, than that which was of old, "for in him dwelt the fulneſs of the Godhead bodily," Col. ii. 9. Now, if this ſpiritual building of the ſaints in communion, is the *houſe of God*, yea, and the *temple of the living God*; then it is certain that they are an habitation of the

moſt High, and that the Lord dwells in them. Again,

2. The *ſervice* to be performed in this houſe anſwers to theſe appellations, and further proves that the Lord is there. 1 Pet. ii. 8. "Ye are built up a ſpiritual houſe, to offer up ſpiritual ſacrifices:" and accordingly they are ſtyled, ver. 9. "a royal prieſthood." In all church aſſemblies the ſaints come to preſent themſelves to the Lord, Job i. 6. they come round about him, Pſalm lxxxix. 7. to offer the ſacrifices of confeſſion and give thanks to his name; to offer up their prayers and gifts, even the ſacrifices of joy on his altar, Pſalm xxvii. 6. In a word, having obtained mercy, they "preſent their bodies a living ſacrifice, holy, acceptable to the Father, which is their reaſonable ſervice," Rom. xii. 1. Now, all this ſuppoſes that God is really, truly, and properly, though in an inviſible ſpiritual manner, preſent in his ſanctuary. It would be abſurd to imagine that the object of divine ſervice is in all reſpects abſent, or that he is not certainly preſent to receive homage and worſhip from thoſe who wait on him. But we know that our God is with us.

3. By

3. By *expreſs and repeated aſſurance of his preſence, from the lips of his faithfulneſs and grace.* Exod xxv. 8. ſaith the Lord to Moſes, "Let them make me a ſanctuary, that I may dwell amongſt them." What leſs this than a promiſe of his preſence in the ſanctuary they made, according to his appointment? And is he not the ſame God ſtill, to accompliſh his promiſe in regard of his ordinances under the preſent diſpenſation? Again he ſaith, Levit. xxvi. 11. "I will ſet my tabernacle among you, and will walk among you." And remarkable is the declaration, Exod. xx. 24. "In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bleſs thee." This promiſe is not confined to any one place, no not even to the temple which was at Jeruſalem, where the Lord ſet his name under the former diſpenſation: it is doubtleſs a gracious engagement to be preſent with his ſaints in whatever aſſembly they meet, agreeable to his will. The ſame is ratified or confirmed to the chriſtian church by our Lord himſelf, Matt. xviii. 20. and in many places in the New Teſtament. Unworthy, therefore, as we are of ſo great a privilege, conſcientiouſly united in the order of the goſpel, and gathering our-

ſelves together in the name of the Lord, we may humbly claim this dignified character of "an habitation of God through the Spirit," being fully perſuaded that he dwells in the midſt of his people. Once more,

4. THE *teſtimony of univerſal experience confirms it.* Of old they had ſenſible and undeniable tokens of God's preſence with them. We read, 1 Kings x. 11. that "the glory of the LORD filled the houſe of the LORD." Many paſſages ſhew that in the former houſe, the Lord was to be ſeen; and though it may be his manifeſtations were not always alike conſpicuous and joyful; yet the wonted diſcoveries of himſelf to his people were ſufficient to engage their earneſt expectation. Hence David, Pſalm xxvii. 4. deſires, above all things, "to dwell in the houſe of the Lord for ever, to behold the beauty of the Lord." And again, when in the wilderneſs of Judah, he thirſts after God, Pſalm lxiii. 2. "To ſee, ſays he, thy power and thy glory, ſo as I have ſeen thee in thy ſanctuary." Whence, or to what purpoſe, theſe longings of ſoul, unleſs the faithful then had been uſed to behold the Lord in his temple? And are there none to bear teſtimony to the like enjoyment in theſe

times

times of the gospel! Truly, says the apostle, 1 John i. 3. "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ." And, have not many of us tasted this grace, and experienced the joy of communion with God, in the way of his appointment? How often has he satisfied us with the goodness of his house, and made us to drink of the river of his pleasure, insomuch that we could truly say, "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand!" Psalm lxxxiv. 10.

It appears then, from the church being styled the *house* and *temple* of God, from the *service* to be performed therein, from *repeated engagements by promise* and from the *experience of the faithful*, more or less, under each dispensation, that the Lord dwells in Zion. So that you, my brethren, now joined in him, and all saints in like manner incorporated, are evidently builded together, an habitation of God through the Spirit. It remains,

Thirdly, That I remark some particulars worthy of notice, which may be gathered from this sublime and sacred declaration. This criterion then of a gospel church points out,

1. The

1. THE *ſingular delight* the Lord takes in his people, when walking in his ordinances before him. Indeed the Lord hath pleaſure in his ſaints individually conſidered, or in a private capacity. Such is the condeſcenſion and grace of the moſt High, that he ſaith, Iſaiah lvii. 15. "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him alſo who is of a contrite and humble ſpirit." Each humble gracious ſoul, who ſanctifies the Lord in his heart, is the temple of the Holy Ghoſt. His ejaculatory prayers, devout meditations, holy affections, and every exertion of grace within himſelf, are unto God a ſweet ſavor. His articulate ſupplications likewiſe, thankſgivings, and other exerciſes of devotion, in the cloſet and in the family, are highly acceptable. But ſtill more pleaſing to God are the ſolemn aſſemblies of ſuch perſons in his houſe, as in them there is a more publick diſplay of his glory in receiving their homage. "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob," Pſalm lxxxvii. 2. His peculiar delight in the ſanctuary of his church is moſt emphatically expreſſed in Pſalm cxxxii. 13, 14. "For the Lord hath choſen Zion, he hath deſired it for his habitation; this is my reſt

reſt for ever, here will I dwell, for I have deſired it." The moſt ardent deſire and longing of heart is the idea conveyed, the ſame with Job xxiii. 13. "Whatſoever his *ſoul deſireth* that he doth." This deſire of ſoul, and holy reſolution of the Lord to reſt his preſence in his church, is abiding, and ſhews his pleaſure in his ſaints in orderly communion; for, who will chooſe and determine to dwell where he finds no delight? Again,

2. It intimates *the honor and happineſs* of a place in this houſe. Church order ſtands highly recommended by this criterion to all who love God and ſeek communion with him. Indeed a mere formal connexion with a viſible church is no honor to any man, in the ſight of him who ſearcheth the reins; nor will it terminate in his happineſs: for, what is the hope of the hypocrite? But there is no greater honor in the apprehenſion of a penitent ſinner, who believes in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, than to be called into a fellowſhip ſo divine, and admitted to a place in that building which is an habitation of God through the Spirit. Nor is his happineſs leſs than his honor; for, although theſe precious ſons of Zion are not always alike joyous in the ſanctuary, yet they who

wait

wait on the Lord ſhall upon the whole, and in the end, be abundantly ſatisfied with the goodneſs of his houſe, Pſalm xxxvi. 8. for it is ſaid, Pſalm lxxxiv. 4. "Bleſſed are they who dwell in thy houſe, they will be ſtill praiſing thee!" And further,

3. It ſhews the very *great importance* of a goſpel church ſtate to the nation or country where it is. The ſpecial and gracious preſence of the Almighty ſtands connected with his church, which is his habitation; and with the goſpel comes liberty and peace. On the contrary, many ſad inſtances prove, that where the long impiety and wickedneſs of a degenerate people have provoked the moſt High to take the candleſtick out of his place, with it have departed the honor and felicity of the inhabitants of ſuch countries. Antichriſtian powers have ſpread darkneſs and ſlavery thro' the land; inſomuch that on reflection the unhappy people might juſtly aſſume the lamentation made by the daughter in law of Eli, on the news of the ark being taken, 1 Sam. iv. 21. and ſay, "Ichabod," the glory is departed! O may Great Britain and her offspring abroad never draw down this ſore diſpleaſure of the Lord upon them! rather, may there be a

people

people among us to the lateſt poſterity, who fear him; that glory may ever dwell in our land! Pſalm lxxxv. 9. That man is the trueſt patriot, the beſt citizen, who is concerned to build up the temple of the Lord in his native country. Once more,

4. By this note of the church the faithful are taught—that as the reſidence of Jehovah among them, is the diſtinguiſhing glory of their houſe; ſo to be duly mindful of this is highly neceſſary and uſeful, in order to their fellowſhip one with another. The Shekinah, or miraculous light which was the viſible token of the divine preſence, and for ſubſtance the ſame with that which conducted the fathers in the wilderneſs, was the glory of Solomon's temple; but this glory was wanting in the temple built after the captivity; on which account, among other things, the ancients that had ſeen the firſt houſe, when the foundation of this laſt was laid before their eyes, wept bitterly. This glory reſted on the mercy-ſeat within the vail, the Holy Ghoſt ſignifying, ſays the apoſtle, Heb. ix. 3. that the way into the holieſt of all was not yet made manifeſt, but now the believer

has boldneſs by the blood of Jeſus to draw near to God, chap. x. 19. "And we all with open face behold, as in a glaſs, the glory of the Lord," 2 Cor. iii. 18. This is that which diſtinguiſhes the communion of ſaints in the order of the goſpel, from any other ſociety in which they may be joined, either as men or chriſtians; namely, that they are "an habitation of God through the Spirit." Drop this idea, loſe ſight of your God in the midſt of you, my brethren, and the ſacredneſs of your character diſappears; you are then, no other than a *common* building, and every motive to reverence, humility, holineſs, gratitude and joy, being in a good manner loſt, no wonder a threatening luke-warmneſs and diſſipation enſues. If ſome, under a formal relation to the church, among whom real chriſtians may be found, who are yet become wanton and diſorderly, had a practical ſenſe of this certain and glorious truth; if they looked on the ſociety to which they belong as the dwelling place of the moſt High, and indeed believed that He reſides among them; is it to be imagined they would trifle in the manner they do? Would they not eſteem their

place

place in his houſe? Is it poſſible that they ſhould through ſloth, love of pleaſure, or for the ſake of a little wordly advantage, on every occaſion, abſent from the aſſemblies of the church, as though they deſpiſed her? Could the nominal inhabitants of this houſe of God accuſtom themſelves to abſent one part of the day, as ſome do, on the ſtated ſeaſons of appearing before him? Surely this divine truth is not in their hearts, nor in theirs, who, by their ſhameful late coming, continually diſturb their brethren in the time of worſhip; or whoſe indecent external deportment in the congregation is ſuch as they would, or ought to be aſhamed of in the preſence of a ſuperior fellow creature. No doubt a realizing proſpect of the glorious Lord on his throne in his temple, will fill the worſhipper with reverence, excite him to conſtancy and faithfulneſs, yea and animate him to univerſal holineſs. The chriſtian who thus walks before God in his ſanctuary, will have no unneceſſary converſe with the world, he will abſtain from all appearance of evil, and even hate the garment ſpotted with the fleſh; much leſs will he make proviſion for the fleſh, to fulfil

the luſts, thereof: Far be it from the man of this character that he ſhould deſpiſe the temple of God, or provoke him to jealouſy! A libertine profeſſor has no pretence to the knowledge of God in his houſe, but will hereafter find that he has affronted him to his face, and that the holy Lord will be ſanctified by thoſe who approach him. So then, the Lord's dwelling in his church, as deſcribed, is a token of his ſingular complacency in the communion of ſaints, and ſuggeſts the honor and felicity of being admitted into this divine order; it ſhews the importance of a goſpel church ſtate in a nation; and likewiſe that this inhabitation of God is the glory of his people, by which they are diſtinguiſhed and preferred above all other ſocieties whatever; a due attention to which is adapted to promote reverence, fidelity, and univerſal holineſs among them who partake in this fellowſhip.

And, does the Lord indeed dwell in Zion? It muſt ſurely be for want of a good underſtanding, or love to his name, if a man ſees no comelineſs in chriſtian communion, has no deſire after it; and much more if he can deſpiſe

ſpiſe it. But, I preſume, there are none of this caſt in an aſſembly chiefly compoſed of the elders, meſſengers, and other members of the ſeveral churches. If, however, there are any preſent who hope in the Lord, and yet can content themſelves out of this order, their folly is not to be juſtified. Alas! this is a caſe now too frequent: but let it be remembered, the real believer who lives out of this communion, is deficient in the evidence of his faith, and deprives himſelf of the higheſt honor and advantage to be obtained, ſhort of that glory and joy the ſaints poſſeſs at the right hand of God in the heavenly ſtate.

As for us who are of this building, ſhall not the conſideration of this criterion of our body, Sirs, animate us to a ſtrict holy diſcipline? Are we the dwelling place of Jehovah, and is the Lord himſelf in our temple? What manner of perſons ought we to be in all holy converſation and godlineſs! How ſhould we avoid the appearance of vanity? Be ſerious, humble, ſpiritual, and charitable, at all times, and in every place, as in the ſight of God before all men! This alſo ſhould put us on our guard and make us careful to whom we

give

give the right hand of fellowſhip. Not that we are to refuſe the leaſt of all ſaints, or deſpiſe the day of ſmall things, which would be unbecoming the diſciples of the condeſcending and compaſſionate Jeſus, who would not break the bruiſed reed, or quench the ſmoaking flax Many babes in Chriſt can ſcarceliſp out their confidence; nevertheleſs their confeſſion, joined to other external tokens of their faith in the Redeemer, entitle them to the communion of ſaints no leſs than the more free and edifying account ſome other regeneate perſons may give of themſelves. But, ſeeing the Lord is among us, and that ſuch is the nature of our conſtitution, that true fellowſhip with us is communion with him, far be it to admit thoſe whom we cannot, in the judgment of charity, conclude are vitally united to Chriſt, and experienced in his grace! What can be more odious or diſpleaſing to the *living* God, whoſe temple we are, than to bring *dead* ſinners into his preſence? They who are alienated from the life of God, and ſtrangers to his love as a motive to their profeſſion, however amiable in other reſpects, are totally unfit for his ſervice,

vice, and cannot be acceptable to him: ſo that neither the love of God or man, pleads for their admiſſion into the ſanctuary.

NEED I more than ſay, with what holy bluſhing ſhould we reflect on the ſtupendous condeſcenſion and grace of the moſt High, that he will dwell with man upon earth! How infinite alſo are our obligations to the love of the Spirit, through whom we are become an habitation of God! May his effectual operation in our heart produce gratitude and love to each divine perſon, that we may live to their glory!

PERMIT me now to conclude with a free and candid addreſs to our dear chriſtian friends, whoſe late union in goſpel order is the occaſion of our preſent aſſembly.

You ſee, Beloved, that the brotherly covenant you have this day ſolemnly avouched before the Lord and us, is no ordinary engagement; it is a fellowſhip moſt ſacred on many accounts, but eſpecially as you are an habitation of God. Fix your eyes on the Lord whom you ſerve; may his awful and gracious preſence poſſeſs you with reverence, and animate your zeal in his houſe! Remember

that

that Judah is his ſanctuary, and Iſrael his dominion, Pſalm cxiv. 2. Jeſus reigns where he dwells; thus ſaith Jeremiah who propheſied of theſe goſpel times, chap. iii. 17. "Jeruſalem ſhall be called the throne of the Lord." Conſider, you are not a civil, but a religious community; yea, and not merely a religious ſociety at your own diſcretion; for ſuch there may be ſubſervient to the edification of the ſaints; but you are a company of believers incorporated under Chriſt, the governing Head of his church. He is your King, and you are ſworn, as it were, at his altar, to his laws. Some pretend, in excuſe of their neglects and diſorders in this ſacred connexion, that a church is a voluntary ſociety, and therefore they may do as they liſt; but they are deceived. True, a chriſtion church is ſo far a voluntary ſociety, as that free and mutual conſent is at the foundation of their union: no man is compelled into her boſom, nor is any man to be forced upon her. But, being thus freely joined in the Lord, you are not at liberty to act according to your own will and pleaſure; but are, every one, ſubject to his inſtitutions, who

is

is a jealous God, and, as already obſerved, will be ſanctified by them who come round him.

If therefore any of you ſhould hereafter be tempted to make light of this ſacred contract, let him remember that his compliance with the temptation would be trifling with God and man, and with his own ſoul alſo.

Dearly Beloved, the ſloth, negligence, and diſorders, too juſtly complained of in a day of religious vanity and diſſipation, are utterly unworthy our holy profeſſion, and bear a threatening aſpect upon us; for, by a looſe conduct in church fellowſhip the ends of that grand inſtitution of infinite wiſdom and love, are ſhamefully, and in a manner totally defeated.

Remember, Sirs, that a leading and eſſential means of anſwering the deſign of orderly communion in Chriſt, is that of frequent ſolemn aſſemblies. By the apoſtle's argument, Heb. x. 25. the forſaking of theſe is the highway to apoſtacy and ruin, both of individual profeſſors and particular ſocieties, of which there are many awful inſtances. They who give themſelves to

ſcatter, little think of their crime and their danger.

IT may be diſagreeable to the popular taſte and practice, but I would hope not to any here preſent (however, I think myſelf bound to it on this occaſion) to remind you, that a wilful habitual omiſſion of any known gatherings of the church to which a man belongs, whether ſtated or occaſional, is not only unbecoming his relation in the Lord, and a violation of his ſacred engagements in his name, but it alſo ſtrikes at her exiſtence. Nor do I think it eaſy to conceive of an evil more deſtructive to ſociety, or more deſerving of cenſure, however connived at in theſe undiſciplined times. If a church is inveſted by Chriſt with a means of ſelf-preſervation, to doubt which is abſurd; ſhe certainly has a power to clear herſelf of thoſe whoſe conduct, if the like univerſally prevailed, muſt iſſue in her diſſolution. And, though ſhe may not exert this power, can it be ſuppoſed that the delinquents will eſcape the notice of her Lord, whoſe crown and dignity are trampled under foot, by ſo egregious a neglect of his precepts?

I BE-

I BESEECH you, therefore, Brethren, by the mercies of the living God, whoſe habitation you are, that you cleave to one another in the Lord, with purpoſe of heart; ſubmit yourſelves to each other in him, with patience, ſelf-denial, and diligence, as thoſe who look not at their own, but at the things which are Chriſt's. Seek to multiply, but not by drawing perſons from other congregations and churches, which is indecent and carnal, and no other than an abuſe of that liberty all chriſtians have of embodying themſelves, when required. No people or miniſter can aim at this without juſt offence, and endangering that communion of churches, which is no leſs eſſential to the glory of Chriſt and the advancement of his viſible kingdom on earth, than the incorporation of individuals in particular ſociety; an attempt to increaſe your numbers by any ſuch unlawful means, is inconſiſtent with the great deſign of this meeting, namely, that you may be henceforward numbered with the ſiſter churches. Shun then the appearance of a thing ſo unworthy this privilege. The communion of churches is for

their

their mutual benefit, but it is poſſible for one congregation or miniſter, under a miſtaken notion of building up themſelves, to enter on meaſures that tend to the leſſening of others, and thereby unhappily alienate thoſe from one another, whoſe cordial union is of the utmoſt conſequence to the publick tranquillity.

AVOIDING, therefore, a ſelfiſh and unſocial diſpoſition, be ready to fall in with every undertaking for the general good. They do not underſtand the intereſt of the Redeemer's kingdom, nor their own conſtitution, who imagine that the independency of a goſpel church lies in a power of refuſing to join her ſiſter communities, in what may conduce to the love of God, and the order of the goſpel. The primitive churches, though being diſtinct, they interfered not with each others government, yet were all united on every occaſion in whatever might promote the comfort and edification of the faithful in common. And, permit me to obſerve, that not only in the new world of America, but in Old England alſo, frequent unreſerved aſſociations of goſpel miniſters and churches,

churches, have of late been remarkably owned; and, would it not be grievous to ſee them diſcouraged in theſe populous cities, where opportunities and gifts abound, and where the harmony of the diſciples is of ſo great importance not only to themſelves, but alſo to the brethren through the whole nation? Satan gets no ſmall advantage by any occaſional diſtance; therefore, let us not be ignorant of his devices, but, as thoſe who wiſh well to Zion, rejoice in an opportunity to unite with other churches in their endeavors after the general proſperity.

And, above all, it being needful, you will permit me, my Friends, moſt earneſtly to intreat you to avoid a ſhadow of diſcord or ſhyneſs towards the dear church, or any of its members, from whom you have ſeparated. May you cordially embrace each other on every future occaſion: This, I am perſuaded, will fulfil our joy, who now behold your going forth in the order of Chriſt, with earneſt ſupplications for your ſucceſs in his name.

Finally, Brethren, let no man among you be wanting in his duty. Pray ardently

dently, watch diligently; be not ſlothful in this great buſineſs in which you have engaged, but fervent in ſpirit, ſerving the Lord.

And may our beloved young brother, whom you have called to preach to you a ſeaſon, be highly acceptable, and even come in the fulneſs of the bleſſing of the goſpel of peace. And take it in good part, that I heartily wiſh you, as ſoon as may be, to meet in a convenient place by yourſelves, that you may ſee what encouragement you have to ſettle with a Paſtor, and not continue long as ſheep without a ſhepherd, or out of the way of increaſe as a church. In the mean time may you, Beloved, and may we all in our ſeveral communities, be ſenſible of the gracious preſence of the chief and great Biſhop of ſouls, who will feed the flock of his heritage, which he has loved ſo as to purchaſe it with his own blood, and, who is over all, God bleſſed for ever. Amen.

THE END.